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DIMITRIJE MITRINOVIĆ AND ERIC GUTKIND: FRIENDS, FALSE FRIENDS, AND FRIENDLY ENEMIES

Abstract: In this paper the author analyses the complex relations between Dimitrije Mitrinović and Eric Gutkind. Their first contacts are briefly sketched and the main part of the article focuses on their renewed friendship and the cooling of their relations between 1928 and 1933. Mitrinović held Gutkind in very high esteem, particularly his gnostic masterwork *Siderische Geburt*. The Great War separated them and they would not meet again until 1927. In August 1928, Gutkind organised a meeting of a group of intellectuals, including Mitrinović, in Westphalia with the aim of initiating a universal brotherhood of spiritually attuned and cultivated individuals. But the meeting proved to be a disaster. Gutkind's repeated letters to Mitrinović in 1928-1930 remained unanswered. They met again in London, in July 1932 but never became close again. Both individuals were complicated and manipulative. Although they never met again after 1932, Gutkind never gave up on Mitrinović and found ways to inform him on his projects through intermediaries.

Keywords: Eric(h) Gutkind, *Siderische Geburt*, *The Absolute Collective*, Judaism

I'm not going to write at equal length about every period of Mitrinović's relationship with Eric Gutkind in the present chapter. After all, part of it – the first part – is fairly well known to Mitrinović scholars already.¹

Instead, I'll concentrate on what I call their middle period. In other words, from about the time of the Villa Springmann conference in Hagen, Westphalia, which took place during the summer of 1928, to Gutkind's flight as a refugee from Germany during April 1933. Why so? First, because this is the period when their relationship underwent the greatest strain, with the consequence that it revealed some hitherto largely unspoken elements. Second, because it is when Gutkind revised his second major book *The Absolute Collective* under Mitrinović's influence.

1 For instance, see Andrew Rigby, *Dimitrije Mitrinović: A Biography* (York: William Sessions, 2006), and Guido van Hengel, *De Zieners: toekomstvisioenen uit een verloren Europa* (Amsterdam: Ambo/Anthos, 2018).

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Mitrinović's first contact with Gutkind was not in person, but by letter from Munich on 27th June 1914 – the letter is lost, but there is a draft in the New Atlantis Foundation archive at the University of Bradford.² It is the long letter in which he introduces himself as a friend of Wassily Kandinsky and an associate of Giovanni Papini, outlines his colossal plans for a Pan-European movement and his scheme for an Aryan yearbook, rhapsodises over Gutkind's *Siderische Geburt: Seraphische Wanderung vom Tode der Welt zur Taufe Tat* ("the main fundamental book for developing our cultural philosophy of pan-Aryandom") and offers him the leadership of the Pan-European movement's religion: "We should like to entrust to you the guidance of the religion of pan-Europe".

It is therefore an extraordinary letter. But not only in its content; it is also remarkable in its style, which is rambling, grandiose, intoxicated and intoxicating, naïve, generous, and glib.

Following that, they met for the first time about three weeks later, over two or three days, in the German university city of Jena. There, they spoke about the Blutbund, aka the Forte Kreis circle – Gutkind and Frederik van Eeden's elitist and semi-mystical transnational pacifist project – as well as about Mitrinović's own projects.

Here is how Mitrinović described the meeting to Kandinsky more or less as it was still taking place, on the 21st of July: "Gutkind is a wonderful personality; [he has] a depth of soul and a purity of innerness which elevates one. We have fundamentally understood one another".³ And here is Gutkind's account of the meeting, this time in a letter to van Eeden on the 26th:

My dear friend, we had very pleasant days in Jena. We had a quite remarkable and at the same time very useful meeting with a Serb Mitrinović. He's a young, truly Slavic hothead, a thorough spirit, who has very remarkable plans and wants to publish a yearbook which must be written by the foremost distinguished people. ... After two days of fantastic debates I decided to cooperate. ... The aim is to propose a united Europe, a unified Europe.⁴

2 "Draft of a Letter from Mitrinovic to Erich Gutkind", typescript, NAF 1/4/1/2, New Atlantis Foundation Dimitrije Mitrinović Archive, Special Collections, University of Bradford. This is a translation, probably made in the 1970s or 1980s. For the draft original, which is in German, see NAF 1/4/1/1. Generally, when I cite or quote from letters in the NAF archive in languages other than English, it will be from translations.

3 NAF 1/3/3/8.

4 The letter is in the Frederik van Eeden archive at the University of Amsterdam. The portion of Gutkind's letter quoted here was translated by Guido van Hengel and transmitted to me by email on 12 August 2017.

What more can I say? Well, we know from another, later, letter to van Eeden, but this time from Mitrinović, that Gutkind during part of the meeting dealt harshly with his arguments.⁵ And we know that Mitrinović already knew that Gutkind was ethnically Jewish.⁶ But beyond these and the fact that they agreed to work with each other, there is little else contemporary with the meeting to add.

Only much later on, in fact not until the late 1920s, did Gutkind write of the meeting as having been mutually understood as the beginning of a life-long esoteric/mystical relationship.⁷

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Following the Jena meeting, although Mitrinović certainly wrote to Gutkind, in addition to Kandinsky, during late July and probably August, those letters have not survived, and all we have are Gutkind's side of the correspondence. There are two letters, both of them in the NAF collection, the first dated the same day as Gutkind wrote to van Eeden (the 26th July), with which he enclosed his and van Eeden's so-called "Blue Book", *Welt-Eroberung durch Helden-Liebe*, and the second dated, four days later, on the 30th.⁸

5 NAF 1/4/4/1. The letter can probably be dated to the end of August 1914.

6 Curiously, Mitrinović categorised Jews as Aryans. See his draft letter to Gutkind mentioned above. "We have full confidence and mutual understanding with those who are collaborating in the editorial work and with the contributors [to the yearbook], the most important people and the most faithful to the future in present-day Europe and in Aryandom (Jewry, the Ugro-Finnish world and the whole white mankind included)." For further discussion of this issue, see, for instance, Shulamith Behr, "Wassily Kandinsky and Dimitrije Mitrinovic: Pan-Christian Universalism and the Yearbook, 'Towards the Mankind of the Future through Aryan Europe.'" *The Oxford Art Journal*, Vol.15, Issue 1 (1992), p. 85, and the references therein. It is notable that, in 1921, when writing about Gutkind specifically, for the English journal *The New Age*, Mitrinović, or his amanuensis and interpreter Alfred Orage, qualified Gutkind's association with Aryanism. There, he is merely an "Aryan by spirit and fire". See Vol. 29, No. 8 (23 June 1921), p. 88. Other ethnic Jews connected with Mitrinović's plans in 1914 include Henri Bergson, Fritz Mauthner, Franz Oppenheimer and David Kerzen.

7 See Gutkind's letters to Mitrinović dated 18 September 1928, 11 April 1930, 14 February 1931 and 12 April 1932, all in the New Atlantis Foundation archive, with the translations in NAF 1/7/1. See also Gutkind's letter to Valerie Fraser of 5 October 1953, where he describes 1914 as the year when he and Mitrinović became "mystically fused", and the statement he contributed to the memorial held in Mitrinović's honour, in NAF 1/8/7/19 and NAF 1/8/6 respectively.

8 NAF 1/7/1. "Blue Book" based on the colour of the cover, which is Prussian blue.

This is the one in which Gutkind, incorrectly as it turned out, tells Mitrinović not to overestimate the danger of war (“It may all quieten down again. I even consider that this is quite possible.”) and to cultivate the “most severe collected Buddhist calm.” After that, they met again during the beginning of August, this time in Berlin, where Gutkind’s parents had a very grand house on Viktoriastrasse. For Mitrinović, this visit concluded with the episode often mentioned in the Mitrinović literature, in which Gutkind’s mother, Elise, gave Mitrinović money for a railway ticket to get him quickly out of Germany and Gutkind’s wife Lucie accompanied him to the railway station, either to the Postdamer Bahnhof or to the one on Friedrichstrasse.⁹

Thereafter, due in part to the war, which Gutkind as a German national spent in Germany, due in part to other circumstances, as far as I can tell they did not speak or, possibly, even write to each other again until sometime during the second half of the 1920s – the date and the nature of their contact depends in part on references in two of Gutkind’s letters.¹⁰

Why the delay in making contact after the war? Well, that is another obscurity in their relationship. I can only think that it was at least partly down to the fact that both of them had other fish to fry concerning which neither one nor the other demanded the presence or even the written support of the other. Nonetheless, it remains odd, especially considering that Mitrinović continued to admire *Sideriche Geburt*, writing of it in 1921 as “of world importance and radically symptomatic for the movement of our Aeon.”¹¹

It was not until the Summer of 1927 that they were again certainly in each other’s company. Some time, probably in late July of that year, Mitrinović seems to have stayed with the Gutkinds at their little house in Gardenstadt Falkenberg in the Berlin suburb of Grunau. The evidence for this assertion is contained in a warm letter from Gutkind to Mitrinović on the 1st of August of that year and addressed to “Dear Mensch” –

9 I have not been able to track down the origin of the story about Mitrinović and Elise Gutkind, but it is in Rigby’s biography of Mitrinović and van Hengel’s *De Žieners*. As for the story about Lucie Gutkind accompanying Mitrinović to the railway station that originated with Lucie herself. She mentioned it in conversation with Mitrinović’s follower Leo Kohlberg, probably sometime in the 1940s or 1950s, and he mentioned it in a letter to Ellen Mayne, dated 26 September 1973. See NAF 3/8/8.

10 Both letters are dated 1931. Gutkind sent the first to an American friend named Richard Mayer, the second to Mitrinović. There is a paraphrase of the first and a translation of the second in NAF 1/7/1.

11 M.M. Cosmoi [pseud for Dimitrije Mitrinović], “World Affairs.”, *The New Age*, Vol. 29, No. 8 (23 June 1921), 88.

mensch being a Yiddish word, meaning a man of high honour and great kindness or, in more colloquial terms, a good friend and a reliable guy. “The days we spent together did us very well, they gave us strength and hope,” he writes. And then he mentions that they have made plans to “unite” again.¹²

But before looking at the phase in their relationship, let me say a little more about Gutkind. For though he is familiar in general terms to Mitrinović scholars, there is much about his life that remains to be told.

Some of this information will be strictly of the one-shilling-life variety: his date of birth, his parentage, the date of his marriage, those sorts of things. But I will also write about his beliefs, specifically in regard to his politics, his Jewishness, and his character.

Eric (spelled before 1933 and for some years afterwards with an “h”) Gutkind was born in Berlin on 9th February 1877. He was the first child of Hermann and Elise Gutkind, Hermann being a prominent businessman, a partner in a wholesale company which manufactured lace trimming and which was at one time one of the market leaders in Germany.¹³

While Herman was a stolid and generally humourless man who spent most of his time in his office, Elise was cultured and lively. She once described herself as “easy going, cheerful, loquacious and receptive to anything comical and amusing” and a “brilliant talker”, traits which, she believed, she passed on to Eric.¹⁴

Thanks to Elise, they were a highly assimilated family. She had not had a particularly religious upbringing herself, had never attended a synagogue, and she deprecated the idea of religion as a mere system of formalities. Indeed, writing of her wedding, which had taken place at an orthodox synagogue in deference to her husband’s family, in 1874, she described the service as going “completely over [her] head”. “I never felt so stupid in all my life than at that moment when I had to repeat words ... entirely unknown to me.”¹⁵

Although Eric was a precocious child, being highly observant, talking early and making philosophical remarks, his formal education was not a

12 NAF 1/7/1. The portion of the letter quoted here was translated by Guido van Hengel and transmitted to me by email on 30 October 2021.

13 Elise Gutkind, “The Gutkind Family Chronicle”, LBI AR 5815, Center for Jewish History, New York. Eric’s date of birth, the details about his father and all other information from the chronicle is taken from the translation by Klaus Schmidt. I received the translation by email from Erich Gutkind’s collateral descendant, Katherine Gutkind, in March 2021. The present quotation appears on page 48.

14 Ibid, 48.

15 Ibid, 49.



*The Gutkind family home on Viktoriastrasse, probably photographed in the 1920s.
Leo Baeck Institute, Photographic Collection, F 2601d*

success. Possibly this was due to delicate health, but, in any case, he struggled with the elementary parts of the curriculum. Consequently, during his early years, he was educated at home. When he did go to the grammar school, the well-known Friedrich-Wilhelm Gymnasium, on Kochstrasse, where no less a figure than Reich chancellor Otto von Bismarck had been educated, he was still unable to reach the expected standards, even though the family supplemented his schooling with the “best of tutors”.¹⁶

Nonetheless, he did go to university. Like his younger brother, the architect and architectural writer, Erwin Gutkind, he attended the Friedrich-Wilhelm University of Berlin (after the Second World War, Humboldt University). Then, a number of other universities. “My teachers were men of world reputation: Virchow, Dilthey, Simmel, Bastian (the lat-

¹⁶ Ibid, 59.

ter the greatest scholar of ethnical history of the earth, originator of our present science of ethnology), Felix von Luschan, and a further number of the greatest minds in Natural Science and Art” is how he modestly describes his higher education in a brief autobiography written in 1933.¹⁷ Then, he was also an autodidact, conducting private research in several disciplines, not least astronomy at which he became expert.

In 1908, he married a divorcee, Lucie Liebe, née Baron, also of an assimilated German-Jewish family – her brother, Erich Baron, a journalist and later a well-known Marxist, would be murdered by the Nazis.¹⁸ Like Eric, Lucie too was talkative, light-hearted and sociable. And the pair remained utterly devoted to each other right up until Eric’s death in 1965.

Politically, Gutkind was on the pacifist, libertarian left. It’s therefore no surprise that, also in 1908, he was drawn to Gustav Landauer’s Socialist Bund, whose aim of uniting “all humans who are serious about realizing socialism” through a grassroots work-based culture of cooperatives and other self-supporting communities strongly appealed to his idealism.¹⁹

Like Landauer (as well as Buber, for that matter), Gutkind conceived of community as an active process. A community wasn’t something that one simply joined, like a cricket club or a conventional political party; it was a creative force that through its enactment brought forth the very conditions that sustained it. It was thus utterly superior to conventional, capitalist, modes of association, which, in any case, were destined to wither away as the result of the exhaustion of whatever art, race, science and technology had once had to offer us.

Of course, many intellectuals in the period were drawn to some version of spirituality or “simple living” coupled with anarchism or socialism. Everywhere they looked they saw evidence of capitalism’s hatefulness and the need for its replacement by a higher system of economic, political and personal morality. But in Gutkind’s case, as indeed in that of Tolstoy, it was accompanied by the intuition that Western Man was living more or less in the end times; that a period in human history had either passed or was about to pass, and that a new age was struggling to be brought into existence.

17 Erich Gutkind, “Short biography of Erich Gutkind”, typescript, Box 66, Folder 46, Emergency Committee in Aid of Displaced Foreign Scholars, New York Public Library.

18 Gershom Scholem to Walter Benjamin, 23 May 1933, in *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin and Gershom Scholem 1932–1940*, ed. Gershom Scholem (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1992), 49.

19 Gustav Landauer, “What does the Socialist Bund want?” in Gustav Landauer, *Revolution and other Writings: A Political Reader* (Pontypool: Merlin Press, 2010), 188. Landauer’s pamphlet was first published in October 1908.

For Gutkind, this new age required superior men, members of his so-called spiritual elite, to make a sort of heroic leap. This was the central message of *Siderische Geburt*, his gnostic masterwork of 1910, and indeed the burden of much of his subsequent philosophy: “Now nothing remains but one single, boundless, desirous embrace. Reeling and drunken, with outspread arms, and completely overcome with joy, I pour myself out in the glowing love of Sidereal Birth, starlike above all stars.”²⁰

But it was not his only message. During the summer of 1916 or thereabouts when he was approaching forty, his thinking took a radically new turn: he embarked on a serious engagement with Judaism.

Once again, I can only speculate as to what motivated this development in his thinking. Such phrases as “an overwhelming feeling of belonging” (Gershom Scholem) do little more than scratch the surface.²¹ And until we have further information it is probably safest to say that this was a path that many assimilated Jews were embarking upon.

One of these, at least as far as the study of Hebrew was concerned, was Walter Benjamin. And it is in connection with Benjamin that we first hear about the development. According to Gershom Scholem, Gutkind and Benjamin’s mutual friend, it was a writer named Ignaz Jeżower who introduced Benjamin to Gutkind and then Benjamin who, in his turn, introduced Scholem to Gutkind.²² In any case, the three men became very close friends, exchanging letters and, when circumstances allowed it, spending time together. That Gutkind was considerably older than Scholem and Benjamin seems not to have mattered an inch, though it probably does explain some of the levity and superciliousness with which both men occasionally treated him.

As for Gutkind’s engagement with Judaism that took him along a number of paths, none of which, however, led him to any sort of genuine organisational commitment, except for a short, anomalous, period when he acted as director of the Berlin Jüdisches Volksheim or Jewish People’s Home, a

20 Volker [i.e. Eric Gutkind], *Siderische Geburt. Seraphische Wanderung vom Tode der Welt zur Taufe der Tat* (Berlin: Karl Schnabel, 1910). The quotation is from the typescript translation in the New Atlantis Foundation archive, NAF 9/6/19, 195–96.

21 Gershom Scholem, *From Berlin to Jerusalem: Memories of my Youth* (New York: Schocken Books, 1980), p. 81. For the context surrounding intellectual German Jews’ “return” to Judaism, see Gutkind’s own article “Beyond Assimilation” in *The Menorah Journal*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (Oct. 1929), pp. 60–66, and, more generally, Steven E. Aschheim, *Brothers and Strangers: The East European Jew in Germany and in German Jewish Consciousness 1800–1923* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press 1982).

22 Gershom Scholem, *Walter Benjamin: The Story of a Friendship* (New York: New York Review Books, 2003), pp. 44 and 171.



Eric Gutkind. Date unknown. Leo Baeck Institute, Photographic Collection, F 2597

sort of settlement house, where German Jews met Jews from the East, and which was very much under the influence of Buber and Landauer.

There is no evidence, for example, that he ever joined a synagogue. Rather, his interest from the outset was mystical and intellectual – he was particularly concerned with the nature of ritual. And it was this, his overriding fascination, which ultimately led to his departure from the Jüdisches Volksheim.²³

Perhaps that makes Gutkind sound like an obsessive. But that's what he was. In any case, there is little doubt that such a position would never have suited him for very long, whatever the circumstances. If there is

²³ Gershom Scholem, *From Berlin to Jerusalem*, op. cit., p. 82. “To my great surprise he became the director of the Jüdisches Volksheim shortly after World War 1 ..., but soon there was a rebellion against him by the staff, who did not want to listen to his talk about the need for ritual in their work.”



*Lucie and Eric Gutkind, c1910. National Library of the Netherlands,
Frederik van Eeden Archive, E1433(II)37*

anything conclusive that can be said about Gutkind's attitude to Judaism, to Jews, and indeed to life generally between this early period and his next engagement with Mitrinović, it is that he was an idiosyncratic and independent scholar. Put another way, he was not someone who opened himself easily to other people's ideas or who found cooperation on other people's terms satisfying, even though that's precisely what he hungered for. Generally, he was far happier and more successful going his own way.

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I said earlier that Mitrinović and Gutkind probably did not meet again until during the summer of 1927, this being the occasion when Mitrinović seems to have stayed with the Gutkinds at their house in Gardenstat Falkenberg, Grunau. One of the subjects that they spoke about during Mitrinović's visit was the manuscript of a book that Gutkind was working on, the book that would eventually appear under the title of *The Absolute Collective*, in English, in 1937.

Following this meeting, the connection again flagged. It was not picked up until the spring of 1928, when, following a further prolonged silence on Mitrinović's part, Gutkind contacted Mitrinović a further time, once more addressing him as "Dear Mensch" and describing, amongst other things, his further progress on *The Absolute Collective*. This time, he said – erroneously – that he had finished the book. "I feel I have gone

a step forward and opened up a new perspective. Not a large book 110 pages typescript. i.e. very compact and concise, as you wanted it.”²⁴

Other topics in the letter included news about a lecture that he had recently given on the subject of ritual, “which caused quite a discussion.” The main point came at the end, however. “How about your coming here [i.e. to Berlin]? Shall we try to arrange some co-operation this summer? Hold meetings? Organise groups? Couldn’t we materialise some of our ideas at last? I shall be disappointed if you continue to be so silent. We must try to meet – but at an elevated level.”

However, as Mitrinović did not respond to that letter either – nor to others that Gutkind sent – Gutkind pressed on with organising what became the Villa Springmann conference alone, and it was not until some time towards the middle of July, after further cajoling, that Mitrinović finally agreed to attend it.

Gutkind’s ideas for the conference were very much along the same lines as those that he had shared with Frederik van Eeden in the years before the Blutbund meeting. In other words, it would be another attempt to initiate a universal brotherhood of spiritually attuned and cultivated individuals, who would meet together in a spirit of “cleanliness”, “sincerity” and “risk” and, figuratively, “turn the world around”.²⁵ In fact, the only notable differences were some minor changes in idiom and the use of the phrase “the absolute collective”. “The absolute collective is always gathered around the primary and the final meaning of all existence, and is nothing natural at all.”²⁶

He put the plan in a circular letter to Mitrinović and to a number of other prospective participants towards the end of June.

Some of these prospective participants were old friends from his Blutbund days, people like Henri Borel, Theodore Däubler, Poul Bjerre, and Upton Sinclair, though not, strangely enough – at least not initially – Frederik Van Eeden (He was not invited until the middle of July, much to his pain and disappointment.) Others were friends or acquaintances of more recent vintage, men like Alfred Adler (who Mitrinović already knew), the novelist Herman Hesse, the philosopher Ludwig Klages, the painter Marc Chagall, and an American named Richard Mayer, a friend who would go on to play a minor role in Gutkind’s life following his escape from Germany.²⁷

24 Eric Gutkind to Dimitrije Mitrinović, 17 March 1928. NAF 1/7/1.

25 “Einladung von Erich Gutkind gerichtet an Frederik van Eeden am 17. Juli 1928”, in Christine Holste, *Der Forte-Kreis (1910–1915): Rekonstruktion eines utopischen Versuchs* (M&P, 1992), 297.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid, 298–99, for Gutkind’s list of prospective attendees.

Initially, Gutkind planned to hold the conference in or near Paris. But then when both options proved inconvenient, he switched the location to the Villa Springmann in Hagen, Westphalia. And that's where it opened on the 22nd August 1928. The advantage of this location, he told Mitrinović in a letter from Paris on the 2nd of August, was that Ruth Springmann, the wealthy owner of the villa and a "great friend" of his and a "serious and noble woman", had agreed to provide the attendees with food and accommodation.²⁸

There however lay the rub. Partly because Frau Springmann only had room for ten or so attendees, only a handful of people turned up: Mitrinović, Nicolai Scheierman, Otto Buchinger, Kurt Kroner, Horst Mühler, Adele Kaufmann, Gerrit Mannoury, plus another old friend of Gutkind, the mathematician L.E.J. "Bertus" Brouwer – though he seems to have arrived later than the others.

But, in any case, the conference was a disaster. Rather than draw the participants deeper into his ideas by a combination of tact and generosity, Gutkind appeared arrogant and bull-headed. He spent far too short a time listening to the views of the other participants and far too much time pushing his own opinions forward.

Most seriously, he quarrelled vehemently with Nicolai Scheierman. This ascetic Swede had his own strong views about how a community of the sort that Gutkind had written about should be formed, and he didn't relish being lectured to by a Jew – and certainly not by such an undiplomatic and single-minded one as Gutkind!

That religion was very much at the heart of their disagreement is revealed in the exchange of letters that followed the conference, which ended on the 27th or the 28th. In one, Scheierman accuses Gutkind of treating Judaism as "infallible" and all other religions as "*inferior*",²⁹ while in another (to Mitrinović, this time) he describes having laughed with Buchinger about Gutkind as the leader of a "Jewish conspiracy". "We had a good laugh at the great 'Jewish conspiracy' under the Presidency of Gutkind ..., which aims at destroying the 'world'. It would have to be a very *small* world that he would be able to damage – his powers of darkness would hardly be able to extinguish a candle."³⁰

Due to his tactlessness, Gutkind also offended Adele Kaufmann, Horst Mühler and his hostess Frau Springmann. But it was the doctor and pioneer of medical fasting Otto Buchinger who, in his response to the debacle, wrote the shrewdest letter of the correspondence. Rather

28 Eric Gutkind to Dimitrije Mitrinović, 2 August 1928. NAF 1/7/1.

29 Nicolai Scheierman to Eric Gutkind, 27 September 1928. NAF 1/7/17.

30 Nicolai Scheierman to Dimitrije Mitrinović, 2 October 1928. NAF 1/7/17.



The conference at the Villa Hagen, Westphalia, August 1928. From left to right: Eric Gutkind, Gerrit Mannoury, Adele Kaufmann, Nicolai Scheierman, Kurt Kroner, Ruth Springmann, Otto Buchinger, Lucie Gukind and Dimitrije Mitrinović. New Atlantis Foundation Dimitrije Mitrinović Archive, NAF 11/2/5

than tackle Gutkind in general terms about his attitude to religion, he focused his disappointment on Gutkind's profoundly unsympathetic treatment of Christianity:

If you were to attack the Prussian National Church, Roman Catholic Imperialism, the sly lies of bourgeois Christianity or the many perversities of Paulinism and Christian teaching ... I would be willing to join you But Christ's inner light (a poor expression for that powerful, light world!) is for me the breath of life and the higher reality.

Of course Niki [Scheierman] has his own ideas, and also Adele and I too. But we can always agree in spirit at what I call the second floor level.

Won't you join us without quarrelling? For coffee and cakes? Personally I like that better than a good roast and French champagne as long as we are all sincere and on good terms.³¹

For his part, Mitrinović seems to have played a double role at the meeting and in the correspondence afterwards, defending Gutkind one moment, then speaking more critically at others. But what is possibly of most interest to Mitrinović scholars is that both sides in the argument deferred to and confided in him. He, not Gutkind, was considered the final authority on matters human and spiritual.

³¹ Otto Buchinger to Eric Gutkind, 7 October 1928. NAF 1/7/17.

Possibly Mitrinović found joy in the conflict. This at least is one interpretation of a comment Scheierman made to him in a letter dated 17th March 1929: “I only now ... understand your attitude, when in Hagen ... you expected me to go to fight with Gutkind since he attacked the assembly, but I think it silly to fight with everyone.”³²

One might also read something into Mitrinović’s expression in the group photograph which was taken to commemorate the conference. To me, it suggests a man conscious of himself as superior to the occasion and distancing himself emotionally and intellectually.

While Gutkind too was obviously disappointed with the conference, he did not give up his ambition for a spiritual elite. Ten days or so after the conference he was in touch with Mitrinović again, welcoming him to a meeting in Berlin, where, presumably, they again discussed *The Absolute Collective*. He then wrote to him on the 18th September, initiating a further long, if again one-sided correspondence, with talk of another conference, a mini version this time, to take place before the new year, consisting of just himself, Mitrinović and Brouwer:

There must be steps – a kernel surrounded by rings – the whole emanating from us. Then a three-some. Then a group of seven. Then ten. When we succeed in that we shall have got well on the way. Round this kernel of several layers there must be a body of two dozen persons. Then “The Hundred.”³³

But when no reply came from Mitrinović, even he must have been convinced he was spitting in the wind. Not for the first or the last time, a rather desperate tone entered their correspondence: “What is required is a minimum communication (even a postcard or telegram) as to whether you can come. I consider your presence *most* important, as our *esoteric* discussions form the kernel of the whole idea, which otherwise remain dead unless we *continue* our talks.”³⁴

Dead, however, their talks remained. Mitrinović, with his commitment to the Adler Society and other networks, had more pressing concerns to occupy his time, and 1928 passed into 1929 without Gutkind receiving a single reply or any other form of encouragement from Mitrinović.

Still, he did not give up on Mitrinović. On the 11th of April 1930, he made yet another attempt to bring him to a meeting, writing him a very long letter, containing news about his and Lucie’s travels (they had been in Moscow and Leningrad) and fresh information about *The Absolute Collective*. He told him that he had divided the draft into two books, only one

32 Nicolai Scheierman to Dimitrije Mitrinović, 17 March 1929. NAF 1/7/17.

33 Eric Gutkind to Dimitrije Mitrinović, 18 September 1928. NAF 1/7/1.

34 Eric Gutkind to Dimitrije Mitrinović, 7 November 1928. NAF 1/7/1.

of which would be Jewish. The other part, the “universal part” he would rewrite entirely “in [their] spirit.”³⁵

But Mitrinović ignored this letter too. And they did not meet again until the summer of 1932, by which time Mitrinović’s “falling out” with Gutkind, if we can call it that, had become a common topic well beyond the participants in the Hagen conference.

They did, however, communicate through a third party, and it is this third-party communication plus further letters from Gutkind to Mitrinović which provide most of my final evidence for this, the most trying and unsatisfactory period in their relationship.

The exchange emerged from a conversation between Mitrinović and Richard Mayer during the first weeks of 1931 in which Mitrinović accused Gutkind of abandoning the “universal” vision of *Sideriche Geburt* due to a kind of “Adlerian inferiority complex”. Indeed this, he believed, was the explanation for Gutkind’s turn to Judaism in the first place. He was avoiding adult responsibility.

Mayer then shared this information with Gutkind who, in his turn, wrote to both Mayer and Mitrinović, accusing Mitrinović of transferring “his own psychological complexes” on to him. It was not he, Gutkind, who was avoiding responsibility, but Mitrinović. How else to explain the years since the war that Mitrinović had allowed to pass without making contact? How else to explain his reluctance to continue their collaboration now?³⁶

It was absurd to say that he had recanted the universal vision of *Sideriche Geburt*. Quite the contrary. *The Absolute Collective*, he reminded Mitrinović, was now in two parts, only one of which was Jewish.

I think I am right in saying that it was indeed the association of the two [parts] that has been largely responsible for the [post 1928] split between us. But this is quite wrong! We belong together. I shall only be able to give you a full insight into the depth to which the material was reconsidered and separated by *talking* to you. Here, I think it is enough to give the result. I am going to put “Das absolute Kollektiv” wholly in terms that are *universally human* and *concrete*. With this, I shall be able to “impost” myself, to use your term.³⁷

Alas, Mitrinović did not respond to this letter either, nor possibly to another letter Gutkind sent to him on the same themes in April 1932, though Mitrinović may have sent one or two letters in between. The evidence is ambiguous – it depends on how one interprets some of the phrases in Gutkind’s April 1932 letter.

35 Eric Gutkind to Dimitrije Mitrinović, 11 April 1930. NAF 1/7/1.

36 Eric Gutkind to Richard Mayer, undated but before 6 February 1931, for this quotation and the one in the former paragraph. NAF 1/7/1.

37 Eric Gutkind to Dimitrije Mitrinović, 14 February 1931. NAF 1/7/1.

This letter, however, is a curious one and worth quoting briefly on its own terms. In it, Gutkind complains that Mitrinović has “practically disavowed” him. “You say you are afraid I have lost my vision or perhaps never really had any vision. Incidentally it is a mark of the true prophet that he doesn’t want to be one.” Their “first vision”, he adds, the vision which brought them together, was “imperfect, a patchwork. It was only a part. *One* part of our truth is buried deep in the past, in the great traditions. But the *other* part is far beyond us in the future. We are bridge-people. ... that is our historical relativity in this aeonic moment, in which the aeons are separating.”³⁸

But had Mitrinović really come to the conclusion that Gutkind had never had a vision in the first place? The overwhelming weight of the evidence suggests that he had not. Not only is there the testimony of lectures he gave in the early 1930s, but there is also the fact that his group continued to print parts of *Sideriche Geburt* into the 1940s and 1950s.

Perhaps a more interesting question than the present one would be to ask about Mitrinović’s general attitude to Jews and Judaism. But to answer that would take me far beyond the scope of the present chapter.

At the very least, it would mean a thorough examination of Mitrinović’s bizarre “Cosmoi” articles (with Alfred Orage) in *The New Age* of 1920 and 1921 and his own in the *New Britain* of 1933, not to mention his various projects with Cecil Eastgate and other followers. But, needless to say, the record is mixed. Alongside the crudities of his open letter to Hitler of 1933 with its reference to “the Black Jew who is the Merchant in Money” are more ambiguous, if not positive comments.³⁹ However, one thing that can certainly be said is that just as Gutkind was obsessed with ritual, Mitrinović was obsessed with Jews. As he (and Orage) put it in *The New Age* on 28 October 1920: The Jews were “one of the five or six chief problems of world-psychology.”⁴⁰ He never departed from this view. Nor did he depart, at least where Jews are concerned, from the racial essentialism that colours many of his other writings.

As for Gutkind’s earnest desire to meet with Mitrinović, following his letter to him in April 1932 they did finally manage a meeting in London in July. But this too, if Gutkind’s brief letter to Mitrinović from Ilfracombe is anything to go by, was unsatisfactory. “Thank you for coming and taking all the trouble. It was good of you and we [Eric and Lucie] are most

38 Eric Gutkind to Dimitrije Mitrinović, 12 April 1932. NAF 1/7/1.

39 Dimitrije Mitrinović, “Urgent Appeal to His Excellency the Chancellor of the Reich”, *New Atlantis*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Oct. 1933). The letter is unpaginated.

40 M. M. Cosmoi, “World Affairs”, *The New Age*, Vol. 27, No. 26 (28 Oct. 1920), 363.

grateful to you. It was indeed a positive move on our long road together and the results will soon be visible. At the moment I will content myself with thanking you profoundly out of the depths of our friendship.”⁴¹

Nothing wheedling or mystical about that. In essence, it is hardly more than a matter-of-fact record that they had met, despite its surface optimism.

This impression of dissatisfaction with the meeting is corroborated by another letter that Gutkind wrote to Mitrinović, on 11th March 1933, just days after the federal elections had confirmed Hitler in power. He addressed the letter to Winifred Fraser first, Lilian Slade second and only thirdly to “dear Dmitri”. “We did not forget, that you told us, you would only answer our letters, if there is something in [them] worth while to be answered”, he writes. “Well [this is] such a letter!” The letter, obviously written at a time of great desperation, offers his services to the Mitrinović group as a lecturer. “Please, dear friends, do answer as soon as possible.”⁴²

It wasn’t many weeks after that that stormtroopers paid a visit to the Gutkinds’ flat in Berlin’s Von Der Heydt Street. But, fortunately, they had already left. They had crossed the border from Germany into Holland. By August, they were in England. And on the 23rd of that month, they left Southampton for New York. They then moved in with Richard Mayer at Harmony House, in Kendal Green, Massachusetts, before, shortly after, settling down in New York. Thereafter, they spent the rest of their lives on the American continent, except for a trip to Europe and the Middle East in 1935, when they stayed with Mitrinović’s associate W.T. Symons in Woburn Square. If they met Mitrinović on that occasion, the records are silent.

So, what, in summary, of Mitrinović’s relationship with Gutkind? It certainly wasn’t all grim. But, as the former pages show, it did go through a period of difficulties. Both were complicated, manipulative, men. And both were often intolerant of people who disagreed with them.

That said, Gutkind never did give up on Mitrinović. Though he stopped writing him and they never met again, he kept up-to-date with Mitrinović’s various projects. When friends and followers of Mitrinović came to New York, they looked him up, and, almost invariably, he found the time to see them. One visitor with whom he became very close was Leo Kohlberg. Another was Watson Thomson. When Thomson set up an intentional community on Mitrinovićian lines in Winnipeg, in 1943, the

41 Eric Gutkind to Dimitrije Mitrinović, July 1932. NAF 1/7/1.

42 Eric Gutkind to Winifred Fraser, Lilian Slade and Dimitrije Mitrinović, 11 March 1933. NAF 1/7/1.

two collaborated on a book and on various educational matters. Then, in 1950, when Harry Rutherford visited America, he too spent time with Gutkind.

Thanks to Lucie, there was even talk at that time of Gutkind coming to England. But that idea Kohlberg and Rutherford quashed. As Rutherford put it in a letter to Ellen Mayne, neither of them thought that Gutkind would be happy there. “He has settled down to his present lines of thought and the meeting with D. M. would either be polite and pleasant, or it would disturb Erich’s mind too much.”⁴³



*Lucie and Eric Gutkind, photographed by Lotte Jacobi in New York, 1938.
National Library of the Netherlands, Frederik van Eeden Archive, E1433(II)38*

Nonetheless, Gutkind’s writings continued to be read by members of Mitrinović’s circle in London. Use was made not only of *Sideriche Geburt*, but also of *The Absolute Collective*. In January 1944, he received a letter from Cecil Eastgate, who had translated portions of *Sideriche Geburt*. She wanted to know what further writing he was working on, and she enclosed Mitrinović’s greetings. In his response, Gutkind mentioned that he had finished yet another book, which is to say one in addition to the book with Thomson, and that he had recently corresponded with Helan Jaworski.⁴⁴

The Absolute Collective finally appeared, very readably, in 1937, in London, in an English translation by Marjorie Gabain, one of Piaget’s translators. Like Hume’s *Treatise of Human Nature*, it fell pretty much “dead-

43 Eric Gutkind to Ellen Mayne. 13 May 1950. NAF 3/21/1.

44 Eric Gutkind to Cecil Eastgate, 14 January 1944. NAF 1/7/1.

born from the press”, at least as far as mainstream intellectual opinion was concerned, though it was reviewed enthusiastically by Henry Miller in T.S. Eliot’s *The Criterion*, by Miller’s close friend (and Gutkind’s future close friend) Michael Fraenkel in *The Phoenix*, and by F.H. Heinemann in *Philosophy*.⁴⁵ By this time, Mitrinović’s influence, such as it was, had completely vanished. At least, no “universal”, i.e. non-Jewish, version of Gutkind’s philosophy ever troubled the bookshops.

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45 Henry Miller, “The Absolute Collective” *The Criterion*, Vol. 18, No. 71 (Jan. 1939), pp. 255–268; Michael Fraenkel, “The Absolute Collective” *The Phoenix*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (Autumn/Winter 1938), pp.147–155; and F. H. Heinemann, “The Absolute Collective” *Philosophy*, Vol. 14, No. 56 (Oct. 1939), pp. 478–479.

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